Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (currently amended) An isolated variant hepatitis B surface antigen comprising an amino acid sequence wherein mutations from hepatitis B wild type ayw2 strain appear as follows: at position 103 isoleucine is present instead of methionine, at position 118 lysine is present instead of threonine, at position 120 glutamine is present instead of proline, at position ~~170~~ 175 serine is present instead of leucine, and at position 213 serine is present instead of leucine, as shown in SEQ.ID.NO.:7.
2. An expression vector for expression of a variant hepatitis B surface antigen in a recombinant host, wherein said vector contains a recombinant gene encoding the variant hepatitis B surface antigen of claim 1.
3. A monoclonal antibody raised against the variant hepatitis B surface antigen of claim 1.
4. A hybridoma cell line which secretes the monoclonal antibody of claim 3.
5. An assay kit for determining the presence of hepatitis B in a test sample, comprising: a container containing at least one monoclonal antibody which specifically binds to hepatitis B surface antigen wherein the monoclonal antibody is a monoclonal antibody secreted by the hybridoma cell line claimed in claim 4.
6. A method for determining the presence of hepatitis B in a test sample, comprising:
   a. contacting a test sample with at least one monoclonal antibody claimed in claim 3 attached to a solid phase, to form a mixture,
   b. incubating the mixture for a time and under conditions sufficient to form antigen-antibody complexes,
   c. contacting the complexes with an antibody conjugated to a signal generating reagent that is specific for the complexes, and
   d. determining the presence of hepatitis B present in the test sample by detecting the signal generated.